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Prior Lake, MN 55372

Oct. 3, 2007

A Message from the Mayor

Committed To a Safe Prior Lake Community

Daily newspapers and television headlines confirm that American cities are faced with new and unprecedented challenges to citizen safety and health. Examples of lagging community safety, with sometimes tragic outcomes, are becoming all too commonplace.

So how should Prior Lake as a community take productive action? How do we sculpt a safe and healthy community which is a model for others?

To start, we need a devoted history of leadership in safety and health. Prior Lake has just that. While other cities abandoned DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance and Education), Prior Lake has amassed nearly two decades of teaching our first, third and fifth graders about the connection between alcohol, drugs and violence; good touch vs. bad touch; and techniques for resisting undesirable pressures from peers and society.

Every year this laudable effort is celebrated through graduation ceremonies, scholarships and prizes, the Prior Lake Rotary sponsored DARE Bike-a-thon and DARE Day. But there is much more like fingerprinting at schools, National Night Out, Neighborhood Watch and Neighborhood Outreach, just to name a few.

With this tradition in mind, it is not surprising that the 120-person-strong Long Range Planning Committee added another vision element to our 2030 Vision and Strategic Plan this February entitled "Safe and Healthy Community." Then, for a short time in August, a potential threat became real when a level three sexual offender planned to move to Prior Lake.

This episode cemented the resolve of our community and City Council to take decisive action. The City staff was directed to assemble a Community Safety Task Force with representation from the five key groups as identified by the Jacob Wetterling Foundation. They include:

- Parents, grandparents and caregivers
- School, faith-based, civic, daycare and ECFE organizations
- Law enforcement and legal
- Public policymakers at various levels
- Businesses and corporations

The mission of the task force will be to develop a cohesive, comprehensive and results-oriented community safety plan for incorporation into our 2030 Vision and Strategic Plan. To expedite the effort, City staff has already prepared a list of short- and long-term community safety initiatives.

The first and perhaps most important step is discovery. The task force will ask the school districts, churches, community education, civic groups, corporations, athletic associations, clubs, senior organizations, youth service agencies and many more what they are doing right now to promote safety and personal security. From this effort, a list of activities and resources can be assembled and shared with the community. You see, I believe we are already doing a great deal, and our biggest challenge is to discover and share information with one another.

But the effort can hardly end there. The City can use its email newsletter to share information. Our cable channel can broadcast helpful public safety announcements to educate citizens and help them find the safety resources they seek. Information can also be shared at community events including Lakefront Days, Community Fall Fest, Downtown Dazzle, Ladies Night Out, Autumn Gathering and a whole lot more.

Through our research, we have learned that The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children will offer, at no cost, a "Train the Trainer" program for up to 50 people. As a result, our community organizations can all receive important training and pass it along to parents and kids. The City and ISD 719 Community Education will work together to offer as part of our programming, "No Child Should Be at Risk."

These are but a few examples of the activities you will see underway over the next months. In addition, we will ask the task force to put together measurable objectives and watch the progress of our collective efforts.

Each of you who read this column represents one or more of the five groups needed on the task force. So if you are interested in donating your time to an effort that will truly benefit your community, I urge you to contact Charlotte Green at (952) 447-9803 or cgreen@cityofpriorlake.com by Friday, Oct. 19 and become a member of the Prior Lake Community Task Force. Your participation will affirm our collective commitment to a safe Prior Lake.

Mayor Jack Haugen